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ABSTRACT

This paper considers three issues related to the philosophical struggle between journalism and speech communication departments in developing a public relations curriculum. The three issues are as follows: (1) the definition of public relations, with an emphasis on persuasion; (2) the design of a public relations curriculum, using the one at Auburn University (Alabama) as a model; and (3) the rationale for including the public relations curriculum in a department of speech communication. (RL)

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"Sharing a Public Relations Program with a Department of Journalism"

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"Sharing a Public Relations Program with a Department of Journalism"

The title of the paper assigned to me is "Sharing a Public Relations Program with a Department of Journalism." It probably should be titled "The Philosophical Struggle Between Journalism and Speech Communication in Developing a Public Relations Curriculum." This philosophical conflict is not caused by any unusual differences between the two departments at Auburn University; on the contrary, it is endemic to relations between journalists and public relations practitioners. One observer has noted that journalists harbor "an under-the-skin superciliousness" toward public relations practitioners and look "down upon public relations as something foreign to journalism."[1] One journalism educator observes that "Relations between newsmen and public-relations specialists are a curious mixture of animosities and friendly cooperation. The action of Sigma Delta Chi, professional journalistic fraternity, in banning further memberships for men in public relations early in the 1950s reflects the former. The fact that . . . more than a third of those listed in Who's Who in Public Relations in 1965 had started in news work" explains the friendly cooperation.[2] That same schizophrenia is evident in our journalism department which insisted on being included in the program, but views the public relations profession with at least mild contempt.

In this paper I want to consider three issues: (1) the definition of public relations, (2) the public relations curriculum at Auburn University, and (3) the rationale for including the public relations curriculum in a department of speech communication.

1. Definition of Public Relations: Admittedly, the term "public relations" is not an easy one to define. As Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center observe in the third edition of their book, Effective Public Relations: "A wide variety of activities parades under the banner. There is still some difference between the function as defined in textbooks and the function as practiced. The literature and shoptalk of the craft are filled with an abundance of definitions. Some lack universality; others are too broad. Many define PR as it ought to be; not as it sometimes is. As a term and as a vocation, it means different things to different people." Despite the wide variety of activities in which the public relations person may be engaged, Cutlip and Center go on to say that "The practitioner /of public relations/ is essentially a specialist in communications."[3] Subsequent editions depart from these exact words, but in the fifth edition they define public relations as "the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance, based upon mutually satisfactory two-way communications."[4] Cutlip and Center stated this more succinctly in the third edition when they said: "The core of full-blown practice is emphathic listening and persuasive communication."[5]

Edward L. Bernays, a successful practitioner and teacher of public relations, uses the term "public relations" to mean "(1) information given to the public, (2) persuasion directed at the public to modify attitudes and actions, and (3) efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with that institution."[6]

In Fundamentals of Public Relations: Professional Guidelines, Concepts, and Integrations, Lawrence W. Nolte states that "Public relations involves both policy and practice, the policy of management and the practice of communication experts who, through use of their skills, attempt to influence public opinion."[7]

The most precise definition is provided by John E. Marston in his book Modern Public Relations. According to him, "Public relations is planned, persuasive communication designed to influence significant publics."[8]

In summary, then, two ideas consistently thread their way through these definitions: (1) The public relations person is a communications expert. (2) The public relations person must use persuasion.

2. Content of a Public Relations Curriculum. In determining the content of a public relations curriculum, the needs of the practitioner of the arts are the best guide. In his book, Successful Public Relations For Colleges and Universities, Sidney Kobre comments: "From a practical point of view, the public relations man realizes that more than one communication channel is needed. The audience he wishes to reach may be exposed to one communication channel, but may miss another totally." As a result, says Kobre, "In planning for an effective /public relations/ program, the director should use a multimedia approach to his problem of communications. With this method, he employs all printed, electronic and personal communication channels (italics added) to reach his publics. . . ."[9]

The printed word, the spoken word, film, radio, television, advertising, and displays and exhibits are all channels of communication used by public relations specialists.[10] A survey conducted in 1976 by Charles Tatum, then a graduate student in speech communication at Auburn University, emphasized the importance of these channels. He mailed 100 questionnaires "to businesses which use /public relations practitioners/ as an extensive function of their work."[11] Sixty-two percent of the questionnaires were returned. The results showed that these professionals believe that a major in public relations should include courses in writing, speaking, radio, television, and film.

Clearly, theorists and practitioners agree that a public relations curriculum must explore all channels of communication that will be used: writing, speaking, radio, television, and film.

At Auburn University, the public relations major chooses one of two options: public relations-journalism or public relations-speech communication. Although the two curricula share similarities, some significant differences emerge.

A. Students in both curricula must complete the following courses:

1. General Curriculum required of all students in the school of Arts and Sciences:

Foreign Language	one year	15 hours
English Composition	one year	9 hours
World History	one year	9 hours
Political Science	two courses	10 hours
Natural Science	two courses	10 hours
English Literature	one year	9 hours
Sociology	one course	5 hours
Math or Philosophy	two courses	10 hours

2. Journalism 101 - Newspaper Style

3. Journalism 204 or Speech Communication 204 - Introduction to Public Relations

4. Twenty hours from the following courses:

a. Marketing 241 - Business Law (4)
b. Marketing 331 - Principles of Marketing (5)
c. Marketing 332 - Marketing Communication Management (5)
d. Marketing 341 - Consumer Analysis (5)
e. Sociology 204 - Social Behavior (5)
f. Sociology 507 - Public Opinion and Propaganda (5)
g. Psychology 211 - Psychology (5)
h. Economics 200 - Economics I (5)
i. Economics 202 - Economics II (5)
j. Psychology 531 - Social Psychology (5)
k. Political Science 341 - Pressure Groups (5)
l. Political Science 342 - Politics and the Media (5)
m. English 304 - Technical Writing (3)
n. English 315 - B & P Report Writing (3)
o. English 390 - Advanced Composition (5)
p. English 415 - Written Business Communication (3)
q. English 416 - Applied Writing & Editing (3)

B. Students in both curricula are required to complete a minor field:

1. Students in the journalism option take three of the following speech communication courses:

   a. SC 211 - Public Speaking (5)
   b. SC 301 - Speech Communication Theories (5)
   c. SC 336 - Television Production - Direction I (5)
   d. SC 338 - Broadcast News Writing (5)

2. Students in the speech communication option take three of the following:

   a. JM 221 - Beginning Newswriting (5)
   b. JM 224 - Copyreading or Editing (3)
   c. JM 313 - Reporting (5)
   d. JM 321 - Newspaper Makeup and Layout (5)
   e. JM 322 - Feature Writing (5)

C. Students in both curricula are required to complete a major.

1. Students in the journalism option must complete 45 hours in journalism.

2. Students in the speech communication option must complete the following specially selected sequence of courses:

   a. <u>All of the following courses</u>:

      204 Introduction to Public Relations

      211 Public Speaking

      504 Case Studies in Public Relations

      511 Persuasive Speaking

   b. <u>Four of the following courses</u>:

      235 Modes of Film Communication

      334 Radio Production I

      336 Television Production I

      338 Broadcast News Writing

      538 Television-Radio-Film Writing

c. Two of the following courses:

301 Speech Communication Theories

337 Film Production I

505 Survey Research Methods

531 Social Influence of Mass Communication

534 Radio Production II

536 Television Production II

537 Television Production III

539 Internship

We perceive three specific strengths in both the speech communication and journalism options of this curriculum. First, both provide a broad, liberal education, which all public relations textbook authors agree is a necessity for the successful practitioner. Our students get an intensive exposure to English, history, a foreign language, state and national government, a natural science, introductory sociology, and math or philosophy. Second, both allow a choice of courses which describe and explain individual and group human behavior. Included are such courses as Social Psychology, Consumer Analysis, and Social Behavior. Third, both permit students to select courses which study the formation of public opinion in courses such as Public Opinion and Propaganda, Pressure Groups, and Politics and the Media.

We believe the speech communication option has three important additional advantages: (1) It includes coursework in persuasion. (2) It surveys all five major modes of communication. (3) It permits students to learn methods of researching public opinion.

3. Justification for Placing the Public Relations Curriculum in the Department of Speech Communication. "The really important key word" in defining public relations, says Marston, is "persuasive". Public relations "is persuasive because someone wants someone else to do something or believe something." Continuing, Marston observes that "persuasion belongs to a very large and ancient family of human activity. The lawyer presenting a case to the jury, the pastor preaching a sermon, the salesperson selling machinery or shoes, the city school superintendent seeking support for a new building bond issue, and the United States senator running for reelection are all members of the family of persuaders. All of them try to influence other human beings to believe as they do. The men and women who practice public relations are persuaders also."[12] Thus, speech communication is a natural home for a public relations curriculum. Our discipline has evolved from classical rhetoric, which originated from citizens' needs to persuade others to a viewpoint. Consequently, we understand the value and role of persuasion in a free society. We recognize that the term "persuasion" is not synonymous with propaganda, lying, or chicanery. And ultimately a public relations practitioner is also a persuader, even when only information is being given. For example, the informative articles circulated by Mobil Oil Company are designed to build good will for the company.

On the other hand, many journalists and journalism professors consider public relations practitioners as unscrupulous hucksters, who are willing to sell their services to the highest bidder. The reaction of the Washington press corps toward one of their members who accepts assignment as press secretary for the president reflects this attitude. Once a colleague becomes press secretary to the president, the press corps regard him as an

unreliable source whose loyalty to the president obscures his vision, distorts his thinking, and biases his reporting. In other words, the art of persuasion, the essence of public relations, is not considered a proper activity for a journalist. The avowed goal of most programs in journalism is to train the journalist to be a thorough investigator and an objective reporter. The lack of training in and understanding of the role and value of persuasion in a free society hampers some journalists in a persuasive assignment. They feel guilty about such assignments. For example, President Ford's first choice of a press secretary, a journalist, quit after a few months because of philosophical misgivings about his duties.

Speech scholars, teachers, and practitioners, however, understand that advocacy is a legitimate practice which must be ethical to be maximally effective.

Because of the philosophical differences about persuasion between the two disciplines, I do not believe that departments of journalism and speech communication can ever share a public relations program enthusiastically. The alliance will always be an uneasy one.

Footnotes

1. Carl E. Linstrom, The Fading American Newspaper, (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964.)

2. Verne E. Edwards, Jr., Journalism in a Free Society (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1970), p. 185.

3. Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 1, 4.

4. Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), p. 16.

5. Ibid., 1964, p. 13.

6. Edward L. Bernays, Public Relations (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1952), p. 3.

7. Lawrence W. Nolte, Fundamentals of Public Relations: Professional Guidelines, Concepts, and Integrations (New York: Pergamon Press, 1974), p. 1.

8. John E. Marston, Modern Public Relations (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979), p. 3.

9. Sidney Kobre, Successful Public Relations for Colleges and Universities (New York: Hastings House, 1974), p. 19.

10. Cutlip and Center, pp. 180-202; Kobre, pp. 35-376; Nolte, pp. 353-384; Rex F. Harlow and Marvin M. Block, Practical Public Relations (New York: Harper, 1952), pp. 261-408.

11. Charles Tatum, "A Survey of Public Relations Work in Three Southeastern States," 1976, unpublished manuscript, p. 3.

12. Marston, pp. 3-4.